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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: AFGHAN AMBASSADOR COMMENTS ON KAZAKHSTAN'S
ASSISTANCE, MANAS AIR-BASE, AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, 1.4(b),(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Afghan Ambassador Abdul Haider called on the Ambassador on June 15. During an hour-long discussion, a relaxed and well-informed Haider spoke openly in fluent English about three issues. He expressed gratitude for U.S. and Kazakhstani assistance to Afghanistan, registered concern about the fate of the Manas air-base, and provided a frank analysis of Afghanistan's domestic and regional political situation. END SUMMARY.

CLOSE TO KARZAI

12. (C) Afghan Ambassador Abdul Haider met with the Ambassador on June 15. Haider previously served as Afghanistan's resident Ambassador to Poland and non-resident Ambassador to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. (NOTE: He is also married to a Pole. END NOTE.) He indicated that he is close to Karzai, describing Karzai as a personal friend, and noting he was previously Karzai's first chief of protocol in Kabul. Haider reminisced about arranging Karzai's first official visit to the United States and one of then-Senator Joseph Biden's visits to Afghanistan. He said he was proud of having been one of the first officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to return to Afghanistan from abroad after the fall of the Taliban, along with the current Afghan ambassadors to Moscow and the United Kingdom. One of Afghanistan's greatest challenges, Haider argued, has been rebuilding a government in an environment in which many well-educated Afghans have not yet come back. (NOTE: Haider's own daughter is working as a lawyer in the United States. END NOTE.)

PRAISE FOR U.S. AND KAZAKHSTANI GOVERNMENT AID

13. (C) Haider praised the government of Kazakhstan's pledge to provide \$5 million over the next five years to provide university education to several hundred Kazakhstani students each year. (COMMENT: In our previous discussions with Kazakhstani officials about this program, they have not given us any details about the amount of funding or the number of students. END COMMENT.) "I know how important education is to the future of a country," Haider explained, remarking that as Ambassador to Poland, he had secured scholarships for 18 students. He said that currently, most of Afghanistan's ministers have returned from abroad, especially from the United States and Europe. "Maybe for the next generation, it will be different," he added.

¶4. (C) Several times, Haider with great emotion thanked the U.S. government for "setting Afghanistan free." "After so many years of suffering under the Soviets and then the Taliban, you have given us back our country. We hope that your soldiers can stay until stability comes," Haider remarked.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador noted Kazakhstan is working on developing a formal foreign assistance program to replace ad-hoc assistance donations. He explained that Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin had told him that Afghanistan would be the first country to receive support from this new assistance program. In response, Haider expressed thanks to both the U.S. and Kazakhstani governments. He acknowledged that Kazakhstan has also helped Afghanistan by participating in the Northern Distribution Network for the shipment of non-lethal supplies to U.S. troops, and by exporting wheat to Afghanistan.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM ABOUT MANAS

¶6. (C) Haider raised the issue of U.S. access to Manas air-base, stating that he had spoken with the Kyrgyz Ambassador to Kazakhstan to explain how important the base is to Afghanistan's stability. "Today, I also made arrangements for Karzai to meet Kyrgyz President Bakiyev this week at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Yekaterinberg," Haider told the Ambassador. Haider expressed hope that a solution could be found, but also suggested that "Kyrgyz authorities may need a little additional financial help, in order to explain the decision to the people."

OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM IS "OUR NEIGHBOR"

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¶7. (C) During the Manas discussion, Haider admitted concern about "not knowing what Russia's reaction would be if Bakiyev allowed the United States to retain the base." The Ambassador responded that while it is difficult to predict Russia's reaction, Russia certainly understands the importance of stability in Afghanistan. Haider acknowledged the Ambassador's point, and said that, in the interest of frank discussion, he could not speak like a diplomat. "Afghanistan's greatest enemy," Haider said, "was never the Soviets. The most destabilizing force in the region is 'our neighbor'" -- a clear reference to Pakistan.

A FEW GOOD MEN

¶8. (C) Haider also commented frankly and openly on the political situation in Afghanistan in the run-up to the elections. He predicted a "close contest among three strong candidates." Haider admitted that he "is Karzai's man," but also said he has great respect for the two strongest opposition candidates, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Dr. Ashraf Ghani, both of whom he knows well. In response to the Ambassador's question about whether Abdullah could unite the country, Haider said, "He is well-educated, and he is the only one with a very clean record." He also pointed out that Abdullah, who is usually identified with the Afghan Tajiks, speaks Pashtu fluently and that Abdullah's father is from Kandahar, "therefore he has a very strong support base in Kandahar and among Pashtuns." Haider, who said that he had personally worked with Abdullah, continued to praise him, saying "he is the only one who does not want to bring his friends and his family into power, instead he looks at a person's education and skills."

HOAGLAND